



Education Listening Tour

Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher &
Council President Tony Young

“What We Learned”

Listening Tour Wrap-Up



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Tour Wrap-up: *What We Learned*

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Education Listening Tour: Introduction

Education is the foundation of successful futures, healthy families, thriving neighborhoods, and robust economies. Investing in quality education should be a priority for everyone – at all levels of government and throughout our communities. It's no surprise, though, that schools nationwide are struggling. San Diego is certainly no exception.

Building prosperity means creating new jobs that provide growing opportunities for people across the state. It means retraining the current workforce and dedicating ourselves to their constant education in the marketplace's ever-changing needs. It means giving businesses the incentive to remain in San Diego and seeing the resulting return on this investment. With good educations come good jobs, which create strong communities. Without good education there are no jobs, and without jobs we fail.

San Diego is a leader in the competitive global economy today. Our ability to be competitive tomorrow depends on fundamentally switching our approach to education. Years ago, schools were structured to support 25 percent of students going to college, 25 percent going into a trade, and 50 percent becoming laborers. The outdated, blue-collar approach to education is still being used today even though we need 75 percent of our students going to college. If it continues, we will not be competitive over the long term.

The challenge of preparing students for yesterday's or even today's economy and society is not good enough. We must look forward and transform our education system to prepare students for a different and rapidly changing world. This challenge is greater and more complex than at any time in history, and we face great risk if we are unable to meet this challenge. It is urgent and unavoidable.

Public education in San Diego is at a crossroads. The current education system is expensive to sustain given the financial crisis and changing economic structure in the state. Yet the need to prepare students to be competitive workers and responsible citizens is greater than ever.

A highly educated workforce is essential to the overall future and economic vitality of our city. This key resource to fuel our economic engine requires a high level of commitment and ongoing resource investment.

In recent years, California's public school systems, both higher education and K-12, have made year over year budget cuts. Last year, California faced a \$9 billion deficit, and Gov. Jerry Brown has cautioned further cuts will continue to be made if revenues do not increase. There must be a real commitment to substantive education reform, despite the warning that schools remain on the chopping block.

Budget cuts can't halt school reform efforts. Our children's future can't wait.

As parents and policy-makers, this makes us greatly concerned not only about our schools today, but on the future for generations to come. We must ensure we have the workforce needed to compete. We certainly will not, if we aren't ready for progressive education reform. Nothing should be more important than ensuring our children have the strong foundation they need to succeed in life.

Failure to respond not only places public education at risk, it places the health and well being of our society in jeopardy. We must focus on the learning needs of students and what will ensure their life and work success in the 21st century.

The foundation for a brighter future is a great education. We are optimistic that with the support of education leaders and stakeholders around the region, we can begin to transform our city-wide education system and our listening tour to find "what's working" in our schools is just the beginning stage in fixing our schools.

We thank you for taking this first leg of the journey with us, and hope you will continue with us to make education policy more fair, flexible and focused.

Nathan Fletcher
Assemblyman, 75th District
California State Legislature

Tony Young
Council President
San Diego City Council

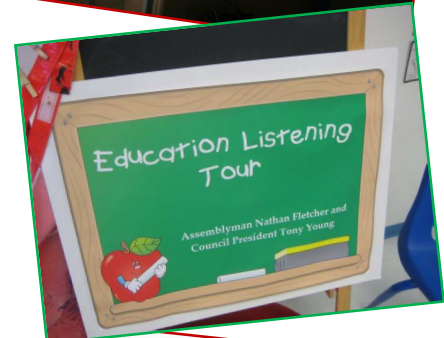
May 6, 2011: Stakeholders Meeting

Overview:

In May 2011, we invited education stakeholders throughout the region to join us at Crawford High School Education Complex in southeastern San Diego for the official kick-off meeting of the education listening tour. Our focus on “what’s working in schools” has required us to spend a good amount of time listening to the thoughts and concerns of local education leaders, parents, students, administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders.

Quality Education

- Quality education leads to better jobs, which in turn leads to a better, stronger economy.
- Every kid deserves a chance at the American dream, and the only way to give kids this opportunity is through quality education.
- We also discussed the reasoning behind 13 years of schooling. Do kids really need to go to school for 13 years? What if they can do it in nine years? Why was the K-12 marker established? Is there a way to change the most current system to a more dynamic model?
- Balanced, good fundamentals are the key to education success—teaching kids initiative, accountability, teamwork, and confidence.



Parental Involvement

- Another important key to quality education is parental involvement. Studies show that students whose parents or guardians are involved with a child’s education will do better in school. Unfortunately, not all parents are able to pay extra attention to their children’s education for economic, cultural and societal reasons that need to be addressed.
- Lack of parental discipline and low expectations for students is a serious problem in schools. So is chronic tardiness and absenteeism.



Community Involvement

- Community and business involvement: it’s important that kids have an opportunity for quality internships and to have connections with the community and business leaders. This makes transition into the real world much easier.

Technology

- We are becoming more innovative—it’s imperative that our schools keep up to prepare our kids for the future. What are we doing to prepare our kids for today’s technology? Should we be moving in the direction of online learning and interaction for students? How can we best use the tools of the 21st century to ensure quality and efficient learning?

Workforce/Internships

- Business leaders in our region tell us time and again that education is one of the major factors to improving businesses and the economy in the region. With education, future employees are learning the right skills and are obtaining the knowledge crucial to employment and workforce improvement.

College Preparedness

- Our students should be thinking about college – or a career – at the elementary level. We cannot afford to wait to teach them the importance of post-secondary opportunities in high school. Let's get them thinking about a brighter future and what that means for them while in elementary school.

July 1, 2011: Innovation in Our Schools

Overview:

In June 2011, we visited iHigh Virtual Academy to discuss “innovation in our schools.” With every advancement in health, energy, and technology, we need to prepare our kids for what the world will be like ten years from now.

Innovation and technology are improving lives in the U.S. and around the world. Without a solid understanding of its potential, however, it is meaningless. We are not investing enough in innovation—especially in our classrooms. Our education system is fundamental to our success as a city and a state, but the way we prepare students has barely changed in 100 years. No child will be able to solve problems, think critically, complete necessary tasks or extend their ability without it.

“For the City of San Diego to be competitive in a global marketplace, we need to prepare our students to be the vibrant, skilled workforce needed for the next millenium,” stated Council President Tony Young. “Are our teachers and classrooms equipped to compete in the 21st century economy?”

Principal Patty McIntire of iHigh Virtual Academy was in attendance to help answer questions and offer solutions for making sure our kids are equipped with 21st century technology to help them succeed in the real world.

We also heard from the business community. Darin Andersen, formerly of ESET Cybersecurity of North America, said it’s about getting students to apply themselves—getting them interested. He also said it’s important to make sure we are investing in technology teaching tools in the classroom and getting technology in the hands of all of our kids.



July 27, 2011: The Achievement Gap

Overview:

Public schools across the state have become increasingly diverse, making the academic achievement gap one of the most challenging education issues we face. The racial and economic achievement gaps are a fact that California simply cannot afford to accept— economically or socially. We know that all children can learn, so we need to give every student the opportunity to do so.

It is certainly true that there is a wider distribution of income now in the U.S. than in any other industrialized country, and that is a real challenge for educators. Yet at the same time, there are only a few industrialized nations in which socio-economic background predicts student performance to the degree that it does in the U.S. Put another way, educators in many other countries do a better job of helping students from low-income families perform at a higher level than in the U.S.

The idea that our top-performing students do as well as their high-achieving peers anywhere is true by definition, but we have fewer of them as a proportion of our population. The performance problem in the U.S. is not just in our inner cities, or just among our rural poor, or just among our low-income students; it is much broader than that.

Here in San Diego, one of the most troubling problems in our local schools is the achievement gap. While we work to ensure that every child has the access to the same quality education, the simple truth is that not all students are making the grade. It is a tragedy that local schools have struggled as student bodies have become more diverse.

In the 2009-2010 school year, just 33 percent of African American students and 38 percent of Latino students scored proficient or higher on the California state math exam, compared with 64 percent and 69 percent of Asians. Worse, only 79 percent of African American students graduated from high school that year, compared to 91 percent of whites.

There are also disparities between native speakers and English language learners, those from affluent backgrounds, and those who live in economically disadvantaged areas. In addition, we see a pattern of children whose parents are active duty military and who relocate to schools.

In July, we met at Gompers Preparatory Academy to discuss the persistent achievement gap that exists here in San Diego. We met with school officials, parents, community leaders, and other stakeholders to hear their thoughts. While there is much to do to solve this problem, here are some of the solutions we walked away with:

- This is unacceptable, and we believe that our education listening tour can serve as a step in ensuring that every child is prepared for a bright future.

- Every child deserves the best education possible, regardless of where they live, how much money their parents make, what language they first spoke, what makes them unique, or where their families came from.



August 17, 2011: Early Childhood Education

Overview:

Access to early childhood education programs can transform lives. Just ask Myrna Sandoval, site supervisor at the Chicano Federation Child Development Center at Casa Familiar in San Ysidro, where we held our mid-August meeting on Early Childhood Education.

Without exception, Ms. Sandoval has seen the children in her pre-school program exhibit increased independence, improvement in language and communication skills, more self-confidence and improved relationships with other children.

What experts know and research confirms is the first years of our children's lives are most critical and when they get what the need in those early years, it can set off a chain reaction of success that can follow them through every stage of their education careers and adult lives.

The first five years of life represent a critical period of growth and development. It is a time when walking, talking, self-esteem, character and moral foundations are established. By the young age of 5, most children's patterns for learning, interacting with others and understanding their world are set.

Quality preschools seem to "prime children for school and life."

Early childhood education programs like the one offered at the nonprofit San Ysidro Child Development Center, harness the possibilities during this window of opportunity by approaching young minds with a comprehensive range of tools designed to foster strong social, emotional and physical growth.

When children are given the benefit of early childhood education, risk factors can be identified and addressed early, stronger communities forged and positive early life experiences created so students enter school eager and ready to learn.

The whole field of early education in the last few years has recognized that the **quality** of a program really has a significant impact on many outcomes for children.

The San Diego County Office of Education has long been a supporter of Head Start and other early-education programs that help prepare disadvantaged children for kindergarten.

As expectations for children in kindergarten and the grades beyond reflect a greater mastery of skill than in the past, we must make certain that all young children are ready to learn and have their developmental needs met, said SDCOE Assistant Superintendent Claudette Inge.

One way to nip the achievement gap in the bud, she noted, is by ensuring that all children are geared up for kindergarten and ready to learn. Children who go to good preschools are less likely to be labeled with a disability, less likely to repeat a grade and more likely to ace state tests.

Experts like Ms. Inge believe the results of preschool are not just tied to the ABC and 123s. They tout preschools that address not only achievement and progress in literary development, but equally in cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical well-being and motor skill development as well as social and emotional development.

According to Arnulfo Manriquez, executive director of the Chicano Federation, preschool is no longer seen as babysitting. “That’s why we need more training for preschool teachers, better coordination to make sure preschools lead seamlessly to kindergarten and new and better ways to evaluate quality services and school readiness goals.”

As California continues to face tough budget choices, preserving and optimizing funding for early care and education programs is a priority for parents, educators, business leaders and community members at large.

Some studies note that every dollar spent on public preschool programs saves tax-payers ten-fold down the line in reduced welfare, criminal justice and education costs.

Continuing budget deficits mean many of our city and state early learning programs are at risk for significant cuts. Here in San Diego, we must maintain these investments while doing more and better with existing resources, preparing more children to succeed in school by further maximizing our share of state and federal early learning investments.

September 27, 2011: Career Technical Education



Overview:

Career technical education (CTE) provides students with skills necessary for successful transition to post-secondary work or education. CTE is a critical component in meeting the needs of students in academic achievement, career exploration, career preparation, and leadership development.

Here in San Diego, there is a need for more CTE. Our students must be prepared for the workforce of the 21st century. To be career and college-ready, you need to be able to integrate and apply 21st century skills, technical knowledge and skills, and core academic knowledge.

CTE allows students to gain a better understanding of the workforce and helps them prepare for a global, competitive market—whether they continue on to post-secondary education or pursue a career following high school graduation. For example, a recent study by Harvard University stated that far too many young people are inadequately prepared to be successful, concluding that half of high school graduates were deficient in such skills as oral and written communication, critical thinking, and professionalism.

In addition, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, whose members include companies such as Microsoft, Apple, Cisco, and Pearson, has been equally critical of what it sees as obsolete and outmoded approaches to education—all the more reason for why we need to focus on 21st century skills.

In September, we visited the Construction Tech Academy at the Kearny High Educational Complex. We visited with school officials, teachers, trade and company executives, and toured the learning facility where we saw students hard at work on CAD programs, construction, robotics, and welding.

One of the big questions was asked by Council President Tony Young, “How can we get industry more involved in the school system(s)?”

“It’s going to take more partnerships with industry and business. We’ve worked to address the shortage of skilled workers, and through partnerships with organizations like AGC, we’ve made progress... but we can do more.”



October 21, 2011: College Readiness



Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher &
Council President Tony Young

Overview:

College attendance generally leads to better future employment chances and higher socioeconomic status. Increasingly, post-secondary education is important to ensure better life opportunities and income potential. Students who meet the criteria for higher education are better prepared to benefit from opportunities available to them. College readiness rates are influenced by the availability of the courses necessary for UC/CSU eligibility, school counseling, and college advising, and the presence of qualified teachers.

According to Kidsdata.org, in 2008, 33.9% of California's public high school graduates had completed the courses required for UC and/or CSU entrance, with a grade of "C" or better. This figure is similar to recent years. In only four counties, 50% or more of high school graduates completed these requirements. Asian American high school graduates were most likely to be ready for college—59.2%.

In October, we visited Los Penasquitos Elementary School, which was recently named a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education. Los Pen has proven to be widely successful in preparing San Diego's kids for a successful future. With a student body of 525 kids, more than 38 languages are spoken at the school, 32 percent are English learners, and 41 percent are socioeconomically disadvantaged. In addition, Los Pen is located across the street from the largest Section 8 subsidized housing complex in Northern San Diego County.

Ten years ago, Los Pen was considered to be an afterthought with some of the lowest API scores in the state of California. This year, Los Pen earned a score of 936. In 1999, scores were in the mid-700s. Year after year, Los Pen continues to make a huge impact in the lives of our children—better preparing them for their future.

And, at a time when a deficit looms large for our state budget, and San Diego's biggest school district faces possible insolvency, it's important to look at the way Los Pen has learned to do more with less – and to accept "no excuses for failure." When it comes to preparing our kids for the future—whether it be post-secondary education or a career—Los Pen does it right.

What works at a school dealing with poverty and a lack of English fluency? Tough love, hard work and a laser focus on achievement. Not rocket science, but not magic either.

Amid all of the jargon of school reform, everyone agrees that the fundamentals of an effective school are high expectations, a strong leader, engaged parents and competent teachers. Los Pen Principal would add one more key ingredient: student data. And, educators who aren't afraid to pay attention to it. She says: "students can't reach a goal unless they know what it is, how far away they are and what it takes to get there."

How can we get more schools to follow models like this? All it takes is leadership.



November 30, 2011: What We Learned – Moving Forward

Overview:

Without quality education and preparing our kids for the 21st century economy, we are denying our kids the chance to secure good jobs and opportunities. The good-paying and high-paying jobs of tomorrow require workers with strong math, science, and analytical skills. If local companies are unable to find qualified workers at home, we are forcing them to outsource jobs or move overseas.

The way we have prepared students for the past 100 years has not changed significantly—despite the massive change in technology and in our economy. But what do we really mean when we say innovation? We mean that today's curriculum requires an overhaul—one that will bring new methods and novel approaches to the competitive edge.

We need bold, thought-provoking reform. We need to be challenging our leaders, educators, and administrators to continue thinking beyond the standard and toward the economy of tomorrow. Nothing short of transformation will be enough to meet the challenges ahead. Our listening tour was a positive step in the right direction.

The world is changing; so must our schools. We need to provide flexible learning environments that combine blended educational experiences (classroom, face-to-face, and e-learning).

More and better bridges from secondary to post-secondary education must be created. Examples might include expanded internships and apprenticeships as well as industry involvement in the classroom and labs of public schools.

Moving forward, this must not be the end of the discussion. We have the opportunity to make lasting, and positive change, that will improve our schools for generations to come by enacting groundbreaking reforms. In addition, there are things that each of us can do every day to improve our schools and help our kids. Whether it is a parent taking a greater interest in their child's homework, generous donations of new technology to schools or after school programs, or a business leader mentoring a student, each of us can engage in our local schools in our own way.

"We'll take some of the ideas we heard on the tour and look into proposing much-needed legislation to help the education system succeed," said Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher.

We thank everyone who participated in the tour, and who joined us every step of the way. We look forward to working with the community, education stakeholders, businesses, and elected officials to ensure we are working toward a bright education future for our students. Our region depends on it.

Young, Fletcher launch 'Education Listening Tour'

May 24, 2011 – By Nathan Max

SAN DIEGO — The inaugural meeting of City Council President Tony Young and Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher's Education Listening Tour yielded some intriguing suggestions that probably won't be too popular with kids.

Make school days longer. Slash summer vacations. Change the traditional age-based system of advancement to a process where students progress when they have mastered the subject material.

Young and Fletcher said at the start that they wanted to hear outside-the-box thinking. They certainly got it.

The meeting, staged at Crawford High School on Tuesday night, was the first of seven that will be held. Tuesday night's event was a chance for a select group of parents, teachers and administrators to chime in on a broad range of topics.

Future meetings will be more focused, with future themes entitled Innovation in our Schools, The Achievement Gap, Early Education, Career Technical Education and College Readiness. The discussions will take place once a month, and the last one in November will go over the tour's results.

"It's important for leaders to be involved and hear and really understand what's going on in education and help make it a better system," Young, a former teacher, said in his opening remarks. "It has nothing to do with politics. It has everything to do with addressing something we believe is very important to the city."

A group of 14 "stakeholders in education" met with Young and Fletcher on Tuesday for close to an hour and 45 minutes. They fielded several questions from the politicians and spoke mostly about teachers, curriculum and parental involvement.

"Whether you're a parent or legislator, education is the most important thing," Fletcher said. "You want the best for your kids, and that starts with their education."

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Fletcher, Young bring business community into education listening tour

By ELIZABETH MALLOY, The Daily Transcript | Friday, July 1, 2011

Two of San Diego County's elected officials brought together representatives from both business and education Friday for a discussion on how to bring more innovation into the region's schools.

State Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher (R-San Diego), who is also a mayoral candidate, and San Diego City Council President Tony Young held the event in Old Town as part of an "Education Listening Tour," which they began in May and is scheduled to run through November. The tour in June was spent focused on innovation in schools, looking at ways to bring more technology into the classroom, and other ways to better prepare students for more science- and technology-oriented jobs.

"The business community has to do more than just say, 'Hey, these things are wrong and we need to improve education.' They have to be an engaged partner," Young said. "It's like an investment, money you put in the bank. You've got to invest in these young people and their education, and that's going to be good for their industry in the future."

Members of the business community who attended included Darin Anderson, chief executive of the computer security company **ESET**, and Damian Esparza, an entrepreneur and board member of United States University. Educational leaders like San Diego Unified School District Area Superintendent Diana Carberry joined them, as well as representatives from civic groups like the United Way.

Some of their suggestions included adopting a more flexible curriculum, making technology training for teachers mandatory rather than optional, and better focusing students' attention on finding -- or even creating -- jobs.

Fletcher and Young's education listening tour is focusing on several components of education, from the achievement gap for lower income and minority students, to early education and college readiness. The focus on innovation in schools is largely to look at ways to bring what is essentially a 20th, or even 19th century education system into the 21st century.

They noted that most classrooms are still centered around chalkboards, when computers and video screens provide far more in-depth and engaging education experiences. They questioned why the school system still spends considerable funding on textbooks, when all the information is available online, where it's cheaper and often more accurate.

Fletcher and Young said they invited the business community because business leaders know what students today should be learning to compete for jobs in a few years, and they are also more often aware of what's available in terms of technology.

The meeting was held near iHigh Virtual Academy, an online school.

"I think we have to really re-look at, in today's world, how do we best engage our kids, and it might not be how it's always been done," Fletcher said. "Right here at an online school, you don't have a traditional teacher. You have a teacher, but it's not the traditional way."

Fletcher said he'd like to try to find a balance of re-training current teachers in more modern methods, and perhaps finding a way to bring in people who work in certain fields to come into the classroom.

"You heard on one hand, teachers need some specific professional development," he said. "On the other hand you heard, if you could expose every kid to a lecture on entrepreneurship from Bill Gates, who wouldn't want to do it?"

Young and Fletcher both noted that there are interest groups who benefit from the education system, as it exists, and anyone who wants reform must recognize and bring those groups into the discussion. That being said, Young said he'd like to see this discussion taking place at more levels of government, including local.

"It's really about leadership," he said. "We need to advocate for better educated citizens so that San Diego can be more competitive in the future."